Numb. 91

The TATLER.

By *Isaac Bickerstaff* Esq;

From *Saturday November* 5. to *Tuesday November* 8. 1709.

From my own Apartment, November 7.

I Was very much surpris'd this Evening with a Visit from one of the Top Toasts of the Town, who came privately in a Chair, and bolted into my Room, while I was reading a Chapter of *Agrippa* upon the Occult Sciences; but as she enter'd with all the Air and Bloom that Nature ever bestow'd on Woman, I threw down the Conjurer, and met the Charmer. I had no sooner plac'd her at my Right Hand by the Fire, but she open'd to me the Reason of her Visit. Mr. *Bickerstaff*, (said the fine Creature) I have been your Correspondent some Time, tho' I never saw you before; I have writ by the Name of *Maria*. You have told me you were too far gone in Life to think of Love; therefore I am answer'd as to the Passion I spoke of, and (continu'd she smiling) I will not stay till you grow young again) as you Men never fail to do in your Dotage) but am come to consult you about disposing of my self to another. My Person you see; my Fortune is very considerable; but I am at present under much Perplexity how to act in a great Conjuncture. I have Two Lovers, *Crassus* and *Lorio*. *Crassus* is prodigiously rich, but has no one distinguishing Quality; tho' at the same Time he is not remarkable on the defective Side. *Lorio* has travell'd, is well-bred, pleasant in Discourse, discreet in his Conduct, agreeable in his Person; and with all this, he has a Competency of Fortune without Superfluity. When I consider *Lorio*, my Mind is fill'd with an Idea of the great Satisfactions of a pleasant Conversation. When I think of *Crassus*, my Equipage, numerous Servants, gay Liveries, and various Dresses, are oppos'd to the Charms of his Rival. In a Word, when I cast my Eyes upon *Lorio*, I forget and despise Fortune; when I behold *Crassus*, I think only of pleasing my Vanity, and enjoying an uncontroul'd Expence in all the Pleasures of Life except Love. She paus'd here. Madam (said I) I am confident you have not stated your Case with Sincerity, and that there is some secret Pang which you have conceal'd from me: For I see by your Aspect the Generosity of your Mind; and that open ingenuous Air lets me know, that you have too great a Sense of the generous Passion of Love, to prefer the Ostentation of Life in the Arms of *Crassus*, to the Entertainments and Conveniencies of it in the Company of your belov'd *Lorio*; for so he is indeed Madam. You speak his Name with a different Accent from the rest of your Discourse: The Idea his Image raises in you, gives new Life to your Features, and new Grace to your Speech. Nay, blush not, Madam, there is no Dishonour in loving a Man of Merit: I assure you, I am griev'd at this dallying with your self, when you put another in Competition with him, for no other Reason but superior Wealth. To tell you then (said she) the Bottom of my Heart, there's *Clorilda* lies by, and plants her self in the Way of *Crassus*, and I am confident will snap him, if I refuse him. I cannot bear to think that she will shine above me. When our Coaches meet, to see her Chariot hung behind with Four Footmen, and mine with but Two: Hers, powder'd, gay, and sawcy, kept only for Show; mine, a Couple of careful Rogues that are good for something: I own, I cannot bear that *Clorilda* should be in all the Pride and Wantonness of Wealth, and I only in the Ease and Affluence of it. Here I interrupted; Well, Madam, now I see your whole Affliction; you could be happy, but that you fear another would be happier: Or rather, you could be solidly happy, but that another is to be happy in Appearance. This is an Evil which you must get over, or never know Happiness. We will put the Case, Madam, that you married *Crassus*, and she *Lorio*. She answer'd, Speak not of it—I could tear her Eyes out at the Mention of it. Well then, I pronounce *Lorio* to be the Man; but I must tell you, that what we call settling in the World, is in a kind leaving it; and you must at once resolve to keep your Thoughts of Happiness within the Reach of your Fortune, and not measure it by Comparison with others. But indeed, Madam, when I behold that beauteous Form of yours, and consider the Generality of your Sex, as to their Disposal of themselves in Marriage, or their Parents doing it for 'em without their own Approbation, I cannot but look upon all such Matches as the most impudent Prostitutions. Do but observe when you are at a Play, the familiar Wenches that sit laughing among the Men. These appear detestable to you in the Boxes: Each of 'em would give up her Person for a Guinea; and some of you would take the worst there for Life for Twenty Thousand. If so, How do you differ but in Price? As to the Circumstance of Marriage, I take that to be hardly an Alteration of the Case; for Wedlock is but a more solemn Prostitution, where there is not an Union of Minds. You would hardly believe it, but there have been Designs even upon me. A Neighbour in this very Lane, who knows I have, by leading a very wary Life, laid up a little Money, had a great Mind to marry me to his Daughter. I was frequently invited to their Table: The Girl was always very pleasant and agreeable. After Dinner, Miss *Molly* would be sure to fill my Pipe for me, and put more Sugar than ordinary into my Coffee; for she was sure I was good-natur'd—If I chanced to hem, the Mother would applaud my Vigour; and has often said on that Occasion, I wonder, Mr. *Bickerstaff*, you don't marry, I am sure you would have Children. Things went so far, that my Mistress presented me with a Wrought Nightcap and a Lac'd Band of her own Working. I began to think of it in earnest; but one Day, having an Occasion to ride to *Islington*, as two or three People were lifting me upon my Pad, I spied her at a convenient Distance laughing at her Lover, with a Parcel of Romps of her Acquaintance: One of them, who I suppose had the same Design upon me, told me she said, Do you see how briskly my old Gentleman mounts? This made me cut off my Amour, and to reflect with my self, that no married Life could be so unhappy, as where the Wife proposes no other Advantage from her Husband than that of making her fine, and keeping her out of the Dirt.

My

My fair Client burst out a laughing at the Account I gave her of my Escape, and went away seemingly convinced of the Reasonableness of my Discourse to her.

Assoon as she was gone, my Maid brought up the following Epistle, which by the Style, and the Description she gave of the Person, I suppose was left by *Nick. Doubt*. Harkee, said he, Girl, tell old *Basket-hilt*, I would have him answer it by the first Opportunity. What he says is this:

Isaac,

'YOu seem a very honest Fellow, therefore pray tell me, Did not you write that Letter in 'Praise of the Squire and his Lucubrations your 'self? *&c.*

The greatest Plague of Coxcombs is, that they often break upon you with an impertinent Piece of good Sense, as this Jackanapes has hit me in a right Place enough. I must confess, I am as likely to play such a Trick as another; but that Letter he speaks of was really genuin. When I first set up, I thought it fair enough to let my self know from all Parts that my Works were wonderfully enquir'd for, and were become the Diversion, as well as Instruction, of all the choice Spirits in every County of *Great-Britain*. I do not doubt but the more intelligent of my Readers found it before this *Jackanapes*, I can call him no better, took upon him to observe upon my Style and my Basket-hilt. A very pleasant Gentleman of my Acquaintance told me one Day a Story of this Kind of Faithood and Vanity in an Author. *Mævius* shew'd him a Paper of Verses, which he said he had receiv'd that Morning by the Penny-Post from an unknown Hand. My Friend admir'd 'em extremely. Sir, said he, this must come from a Man that's eminent: You see Fire, Life and Spirit, run through the whole, and at the same Time a Correctness, which shows he is us'd to Writing. Pray, Sir, read them over again. He began again, Title and all: *To Mævius on his incomparable Poems*. The second Reading was performed with much more Vehemence and Action than the former, after which my Friend fell into downright Raptures-- Why, they are truly sublime! There is Energy in this Line! Description in that! Why, 'tis the Thing it self! This is perfect Picture! *Mævius* could bear no more; but, faith says he, *Ned*, to tell you the plain Truth, I writ them my self.

There goes just such another Story of the same paternal Tenderness in *Bavius*, an ingenious Contemporary of mine, who had writ several Comedies, which were rejected by the Players. This my Friend *Bavius* took for Envy, and therefore prevailed upon a Gentleman to go with him to the Play-house, and gave him a new Play of his, desiring he would personate the Author, and read it, to baffle the Spite of the Actors. The Friend consented, and to reading they went. They had not gone over three Similies, before *Roscius* the Player made the acting Author stop, and desired to know, What he meant by such a Rapture? And how it came to pass, that in this Condition of the Lover, instead of acting according to his Circumstances, he spent his Time in considering what his present State was like? That is very true, says the mock Author, I believe we had as good strike these Lines out. By your Leave, says *Mævius*, you shall not spoil your Play, you are too modest; those very Lines, for ought I know, are as good as any in your Play, and they shall stand. Well, they go on, and the Particle *and* stood unfortunately at the End of a Verse, and was made to rhime to the Word *stand*. This *Roscius* excepted against. The new Poet gave up that too, and said, he would not dispute for a Monosyllable-- For a Monosyllable, says the real Author! I can assure you, a Monosyllable may be of as great Force as a Word of Ten Syllables. I tell you, Sir, *and* is the Connexion of the Matter in that Place; without that Word, you may put all that follows into any other Play as well as this. Besides, if you leave it out, it will look as if you had put it in only for the Sake of the Rhime. *Roscius* persisted, assuring the Gentleman, that it was impossible to speak it but the *and* must be lost; so it might as well be blotted out. *Bavius* snatched his Play out of their Hands, said they were both Blockheads, and went off; repeating a Couplet, because he would not make his *Exit* irregularly. A witty Man of these Days compared this true and feigned Poet to the contending Mothers before *Solomon*: The true One was easily discovered from the Pretender, by refusing to see his Offspring dissected.

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